
Montgomery County

Zero: 2016

UPDATE ON CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Presented by

Montgomery County Continuum of Care

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Montgomery County Zero: 2016 – Update on Chronic Homelessness

Fiscal Year 2017 Plan - September 2016

I. Background

Montgomery County is committed to providing permanent housing to all County residents experiencing chronic homelessness by December 31, 2017. This initiative focusing on chronic homelessness will be the second phase of the Zero: 2016 campaign and builds upon the successful implementation of the effort to effectively end homelessness for Veterans in Montgomery County.

Montgomery County achieved functional zero for Veterans experiencing homelessness as of the end of December 2015. The County's effort has been recognized by both the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the Zero: 2016 campaign. Zero: 2016 is a national effort of 71 communities across the Country who have committed to ending Veteran homelessness by December 2015 and chronic homelessness by December 2017. Led by Community Solutions, Zero: 2016 supports participating communities in optimizing local resources, tracking progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies.

II. Goal

Beyond successfully serving Veterans experiencing homelessness, Montgomery County is also committed to ending chronic homelessness. The target for the Zero: 2016 work in the County has been to create a homeless services system which provides permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness by December 31, 2017. Per directive from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for Montgomery County to effectively end chronic homelessness, there should be ***no more than 3 unhoused*** chronically homeless individuals or families in the County at any time.

In order to meet this goal, we need to identify new resources for housing subsidies and service dollars as well as more effectively use existing local, state, and federal resources. This will entail changing eligibility requirements that prevent individuals with complex needs from accessing housing and prioritizing vacancies in permanent supportive housing for these individuals. Additionally, we will need to invest in creating low-barrier permanent supportive housing that includes both single-site and scattered-site for our most vulnerable. This goal has included a commitment to the "Housing First" Model, whereas every individual and/or family is offered permanent housing of their choosing and intensive, wraparound supports without pre-conditions. In an effective Housing First system, housing is not contingent on compliance with services, treatment or sobriety, but instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement.

III. Definition of Chronic Homelessness

As approved by the Montgomery County Continuum of Care, chronic homelessness will be determined in Montgomery County by following the Federal definition, which was revised at the end of 2015. Under the new definition, for an individual to be chronically homeless, they must:

1. Have a disability, and
2. Live in a place not meant for human habitation, or a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter; or
3. Live in an institutional care facility if the individual has been living in the facility for fewer than 90 days and had been living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter immediately before entering the institutional care facility, and
4. Have been homeless continuously for at least 12 months or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years where the combined occasions must total at least 12 months. [Each period separating the occasions must include at least seven nights of living in a situation other than a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or in a safe haven.]

Chronically homeless families are those in which the head of household meets the above definition.

IV. Methodology

The work on ending chronic homelessness in the County will be based on the use of a “By-Name-List,” similar in format to what has been used on the Veterans effort. The By-Name-List for chronically homeless persons has recently been created based on the County’s current Housing Prioritization Committee (HPC) list and the new consolidated list of clients seen by outreach providers.

Over the past three months, the Zero: 2016 team has gone through the hundreds of names on the HPC and Outreach Lists to identify clients who meet the Federal definition for chronic homelessness. This has been a time-consuming process which involved staff at multiple County and service provider agencies adding a large number of new outreach clients into the County’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), obtaining and uploading disability determination certifications, confirming clients’ length of time and periods of homelessness, and updating vulnerability assessments. Homeless outreach providers including People Encouraging People (PEP), Interfaith Works, City of Gaithersburg and Bethesda Cares—participated in a workgroup to develop a strategy for collecting information about anonymous homeless persons to enable data entry into HMIS and inclusion on the By-Name-List. This effort led to the creation of written policy on “un-named clients.” All this newly collected information has been added into the HMIS database. While the Chronic Homeless By-Name-List is currently a separate document, the intent moving forward is to consolidate all information on client’s chronic homelessness status within HMIS so that in the future the chronic By-Name-List can be pulled directly out of HMIS.

The immediate goal of creating the By-Name-List has been to get a better understanding of the scale of chronic homelessness in Montgomery County, with the longer term goal of getting an exact number of persons living in the County who meet the Federal definition. Because an individual's circumstances can change, whether through diagnosis, living situation, change in residency, etc., a component of the By-Name-List has been to include a separate section with the names of those who, based on provider records, are at-risk of meeting the Federal definition in the future. By being identified as "at-risk" early, this group can then be immediately referred for less intensive service interventions which ideally can prevent them from ever becoming chronically homeless.

The development of the County's By-Name-List will continue to evolve based on experience and input from the providers on the ground locally as well as shared expertise gleaned from peers doing this work around the nation. The Montgomery County Zero: 2016 team regularly meets with groups from other jurisdictions to share ideas and refine systems. The Montgomery County By-Name-List process has been reviewed by the national Zero: 2016 staff and currently has a close to 100% score, which should be reached before the end of the year after some continued integration with HMIS.

V. Current Number

As of September 1, 2016, the By-Name-List includes 209 individuals and 0 families who are either verified as chronically homeless or who have been deemed by provider staff as likely to meet the Federal definition; 131 of this total is from the HPC List, and 78 are from the Outreach List. This estimate is a high end number, as it includes 59 individuals from the Outreach List whose chronic status and Montgomery County residency has not yet been verified. Some of these 59 people are not well known to the staff of the provider organizations, and while the engagements indicate the potential of both a diagnosable disability and long periods of homelessness, this will not likely be the case for everyone that is currently being included in the count.

An "Outreach Blitz" count is planned for October 19-21 with a primary goal of collecting additional information on all individuals currently on the Outreach List, with a particular emphasis on documenting chronic status for those who meet the Federal definition. During the "Outreach Blitz" volunteers and outreach providers will canvas approximately 260 county-wide "hotspots" where individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness are known to frequent. These individuals are not currently engaged with social services or system providers thus most relevant information about disability and chronicity is missing.

VI. New Resources

As part of Montgomery County's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget, an appropriation in the amount of \$250,000 was approved for the Chronic Homeless Initiative. The objective of this additional funding is to provide a range of services from record keeping, housing location and other needs for chronic homeless population.

As the County is increasing focus on getting all chronically homeless individuals and families into permanent housing placements, the Department of Housing and Community Affairs funding was approved for three contract positions that will be key to effort to end chronic homelessness. These three positions are:

1. HMIS Support Specialist to enable the use of the HMIS data to determine the most efficient use of resources for chronically homeless individuals and families, as well as those at risk of becoming chronically homeless.
2. Outreach Coordinator to be responsible for street outreach efforts county-wide including the development and facilitation of outreach strategies that reach out to individuals, build trusting relationships and work collaboratively with organizational and community partners. This new position is intended to help establish system-wide protocols for identifying and engaging homeless individuals and families who are either minimally connected or not currently participating in any social services programming.
3. Housing Coordinator to help strengthen relationships with landlords and housing developers to create more and better opportunities for affordable and sustainable housing placements for persons exiting chronic homelessness. There are currently a number of staff persons at County agencies and provider organizations whose responsibilities include building relationships with landlords and property managers. This new position is intended to centralize and coordinate the existing efforts of staff persons, and create some new relationships at a system-wide level to increase the opportunities for permanent housing placements in existing buildings and new developments.

VII. Barriers to Meeting the Goal

In order to effectively end chronic homelessness in Montgomery County, we must use data to inform how we allocate both new and existing resources. By collecting relevant demographic data on all individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk, we can more accurately predict future needs. Over the next few months, our goal is to further develop a quality By-Name-List in which every household experiencing homelessness in the County is known and has been assessed for his/her housing needs. Not all chronically homeless individuals and/or families require the long-term housing support and a permanent subsidy. Some households may need intensive short-term case management while others may need a long-term housing subsidy but no to minimal services. We will be using HUD funding to complete a full assessment both the County's current needs, existing resources, and gaps in the system.

Prior to the completion of an in-depth analysis of our housing system, we must continue to work to identify barriers to meeting our goal. To this end more than thirty people in Montgomery County leadership participated in an Action Camp in late July to discuss and identify the necessary next steps to ending chronic homelessness. Out of the Action Camp, a number of possible barriers and potential solutions were raised. Listed below are the three main areas of focus.

1. New subsidized housing units,
2. Maximizing and targeting existing resources, and
3. Prevention programs to reduce the number of people who become chronically homeless

The major issues raised in these three areas and some specific strategies to address are as follows:

1. **Additional Subsidized Housing Units Needed** – there is an existing supply of permanent supportive housing units for chronically homeless persons that are available through regular turn-over, as well as some new targeted programs coming on line, such as Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless Keys First Program that will serve 28 households and Progress Place that will serve 21 households. The number of units specifically designated as permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless population does not, by itself, meet the current and anticipated future need.

More exact numbers on the gap between existing permanent supportive housing units and the number necessary to meet the goal will be available based on the results of the Outreach Blitz count in October 2016. In the meantime, three subgroups are working on strategies to make more housing options available for chronically homeless persons:

- Landlord Engagement: The subgroup will work to pursue strategies to encourage more landlords and property owners to rent to persons existing homelessness. These strategies may include the establishment of a landlord contingency fund, development of consistent messaging on the importance of permanent supportive housing in the community, better outreach efforts to existing and new landlords, community education efforts (i.e., housing fairs), and the creation of a centralized source of social services contact information for landlords and property managers.
- New Permanent Supportive Housing Units: This subgroup will explore ways to create incentives for the development of new permanent supportive housing units, particularly through the use of creative financing mechanisms and the identification of potential sites. The intent is to increase the stock of units that are dedicated for use as permanent supportive housing, especially for the hardest-to-serve clients.
- Rapid-Rehousing Models: The final subgroup will explore how time-limited rental assistance and intensive case management models might be better utilized to provide housing for some of the chronic homeless population. This has not previously been a significant component of Montgomery County's approach to ending chronic homelessness, but the experience of some other jurisdictions has indicated that rapid-

- rehousing could be an appropriate housing intervention for those people with a small number of acute issues that seriously impact his or her housing stability, rather than a larger number of complex, co-occurring issues.
2. New Approaches to Using Existing Resources – there are opportunities to create some efficiencies within the existing system. Out of the Action Camp, there were workgroups established to develop strategies around the following two ideas:
 - Transitioning Out or “Moving Up”: An occasional challenge with permanent supportive housing programs is that some clients may reach the point where they no longer need a high level of services attached to their placement but still require a housing subsidy. Currently there is no process of identifying who is ready to transition or alternative program that would enable them to maintain their permanent housing in a less intensive service setting.
 - Reducing the Time Between Housing Placement and Move-in: To focus on ways to improve the existing housing placement process with a particular focus on streamlining and reducing redundancy.
 3. Prevention/Diversion – the goal is to create a system that ensures that no individual or family is ever chronically homeless, so it is essential to emphasis prevention and diversion programs that will keep people from ever reaching a point where they will meet the chronic homeless definition. The most direct way to prevent people from becoming chronic homelessness is to limit the length of time that they are not living in permanent housing. One immediate strategy that can be implemented is to emphasize data collection and reporting within HMIS for those individuals and families identified as “at risk” of chronic homelessness, and prioritize housing placements – particularly rapid-rehousing - for those clients. Additionally, we must continue our commitment to those individuals placed in permanent supportive housing through the County’s housing continuum if and when they are not successful in housing. We will work to find provide additional supportive services and/or a better program match so this individual does not return to homelessness.

VIII. Conclusion

According to the USICH, ending homelessness is achieved when individuals who fall into homelessness, experience it as a brief crisis and quickly move forward on a path to housing. By converting existing resources, targeting new investments, and enhancing collaboration, Montgomery County will transition from simply managing the problem to actually solving it. Reaching this goal will be challenging, but by working together, Montgomery County can end chronic homelessness.

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